

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 TRSE-00 EB-08 CIAE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 CU-04 /038 W
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R 250617Z FEB 78
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5975

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 06096

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SEDU SCUL EG
SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE FROM SHEIKH OF
- AL-AZHAR

REF: 77 CAIRO 23110

SUMMARY. DESPITE EMBASSY DISCOURAGEMENT THAT U.S. CAN ASSIST AL-AZHAR IN BUILDING HOSPITAL OR PROVIDING PRINTING PRESS, SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR STRESSED SUCH ASSISTANCE SHOULD NOT BE GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT BUT DIRECTLY TO AL-AZHAR AND BECOME MODEL FOR ISLAMIC WORLD AND BASTION OF ANTI-COMMUNISM. POSSIBILITIES FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE IN STRENGTHENING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CAPABILITY OF UNIVERSITY WELCOMED, BUT SHEIKH WOULD PREFER SEND LARGE NUMBER OF ULEMA TO U.S. FOR LONG PERIODS OF STUDY. AL-AZHAR LIKELY TO SEEK GOE BACKING FOR ITS REQUESTS. END SUMMARY.

1. POLCOUNS CALLED ON SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR DR. ABDEL HALIM MAHMUD FEBRUARY 22 TO RESPOND TO REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE THAT DR. MAHMUD HAD MADE IN MEETING ON DECEMBER 28 (REFTEL). (IN INTERIM, CULTURAL ATTACHE HAD CALLED ON DR. MAHMUD AND DISCUSSED ASSISTANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN WHICH DR. MAHMUD HAD ALSO EXPRESSED INTEREST.)

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2. TEACHING HOSPITAL. POLCOUNS EXPLAINED THAT U.S. ASSISTANCE IS GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT AND THAT GOE MUST DETERMINE ITS ORDER OF PRIORITIES. USAID HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE IN BUILDING OR EQUIPPING HOSPITALS. AID IS NOT IN HOSPITAL BUILDING BUSINESS AND PREFERS TO EMPHASIZE OTHER KINDS OF HEALTH ASSISTANCE. AT MOST, POLCOUNS SAID, AID MIGHT BE ABLE TO PROVIDE

SOME EQUIPMENT FOR HOSPITAL ONCE IT BUILT. DR. MAHMUD RESPONDED THAT CANADIANS HAD ALREADY AGREED TO EQUIP HOSPITAL, BUT HE WANTED TO GIVE U.S. OPPORTUNITY TO GET IN FIRST AND BUILD IT. DESPITE POLCOUNS EFFORTS TO DISCOURAGE HIM, DR. MAHMUD INSISTED THAT WHAT HE HAD IN MIND WAS NO ORDINARY UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, BUT RATHER A HOSPITAL THAT WOULD SERVE AS A MODEL HEALTH FACILITY FOR THE ENTIRE ISLAMIC WORLD. IT WAS NOT, THEREFORE, A GOE MATTER. HE INSISTED WE SHOULD DEAL DIRECTLY WITH AL-AZHAR. POLCOUNS SAID WE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE UNIQUE AND INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF AL-AZHAR THROUGHOUT ISLAMIC WORLD, BUT FOR PROJECTS IN EGYPT IT WAS NECESSARY FOR US TO WORK THROUGH THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT, NOT INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS.

3. PRINTING PRESS. DR. MAHMUD REITERATED AL-AZHAR'S NEED FOR A 40-50 THOUSAND DOLLAR PRINTING PRESS TO EXPAND ITS LIST OF PUBLICATIONS, MANY OF WHICH ARE ANTI-COMMUNIST, A FACT WHICH MADE U.S. AND AL-AZHAR NATURAL PARTNERS. WHEN POLCOUNS RESPONDED THAT THIS TYPE OF AID MUST ALSO COME THROUGH GOE CHANNELS, DR. MAHMUD SAID IT WAS SUCH A "MODEST" AMOUNT THAT U.S. SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND WAYS TO PROVIDE IT QUICKLY. POLCOUNS REITERATED SAME ARGUMENTS AS ABOVE.

4. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING. POLCOUNS SAID THAT, AS
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RESULT OF DR. MAHMUD'S REQUEST, EMBASSY CULTURAL ATTACHE HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH DR. MAHMUD SHUKRY MUSTAFA, DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF MODERN LANGUAGES OF AL-AZHAR. WHILE THESE DISCUSSIONS WERE STILL TAKING PLACE, USIS/ AID WERE CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS TO STRENGTHEN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TEACHING CAPABILITY OF AL-AZHAR: (A) SENDING DR. SHUKRY MUSTAFA TO THE U.S. FOR SHORT-TERM TRAINING AND OBSERVATION; (B) SENDING THREE MA STUDENTS IN LINGUISTICS TO U.S. FOR FURTHER SHORT- OR LONG-TERM TRAINING. DR. MAHMUD WAS APPRECIATIVE OF U.S. WILLINGNESS TO STRENGTHEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CAPABILITY OF AL-AZHAR, BUT OBVIOUSLY HAD MORE AMBITIOUS IDEAS IN MIND. HE ASKED THAT INSTEAD OF SENDING THREE GRADUATE STUDENTS FOR HIGHER DEGREES TO U.S., WE SEND TWENTY ULEMA FOR THREE YEARS TO LEARN ENGLISH FLUENTLY AND TO OBTAIN SOLID KNOWLEDGE OF AMERICAN CULTURE. HE SAID HE COULD AT ANY TIME ASK SOVIET UNION TO TAKE 200 ULEMA FOR RUSSIAN LANGUAGE TRAINING AND THEY WOULD JUMP AT THE

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CHANCE. U.S. ON OTHER HAND, OBVIOUSLY DID NOT WISH TO BE RESPONSIVE. POLCOUNS COUNTERED THAT IT WAS OPINION OF OUR ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERTS, THAT MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO BROAD RANGE OF AL-AZHAR STUDENTS AND ULEMA WAS TO STRENGTHEN THE FACULTY OF MODERN LANGUAGES, WHICH IN FACT ALREADY HAD GOOD CAPABILITY TO PROVIDE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING. DR. MAHMUD WAS NOT CONVINCED AND OBVIOUSLY PREFERRED SENDING LARGE NUMBERS OF ULEMA TO THE U.S.

6. MISCELLANEOUS REQUESTS. ONE OF NUMEROUS SHEIKHS WHO CAME IN AND OUT OF ROOM DURING THE FORTY-MINUTE MEETING WAS DR. ABDEL GALIL CHALABI, SEC GEN OF THE AL-AZHAR INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC RESEARCH. HE WAS PRESENT DURING THAT PORTION OF DISCUSSION DEALING WITH TEXTBOOKS AND HE REQUESTED THAT U.S. PROVIDE HIS INSTITUTE WITH A SET OF ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA AND AMERICAN BOOKS ON ISLAM. POLCOUNS SAID HE WOULD BE PLEASED TO CONVEY THIS REQUEST TO THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES.

7. COMMENT: DR. MAHMUD IS NOT EASILY PUT OFF, BUT POLCOUNS FY HAVE PERSUADED HIM THAT USG CAN NOT PROVIDE ASSISTANCE FOR HOSPITAL OR EVEN PRINTING PRESS DIRECTLY TO AL-AZHAR. DR. MAHMUD GAVE IMPRESSION THAT, DISTASTEFUL AS IT MAY BE, HE WOULD BEGIN PRESSING GOE TO CONVEY AL-AZHAR'S REQUESTS AS HIGH PRIORITY ITEMS
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TO USAID. EILTS

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Message Attributes

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